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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the reasons that led to the Congressional mandate in 1976 for a national study of sex discrimination and stereotyping in vocational education and of the progress being made to reduce existing inequities and discusses the goals and methodology of the study, which is presently being conducted. First, in an introduction to the problem, comparisons are drawn generally between the salaries and career positions of working men and women, and an analysis is given of the number of women employed and their educational backgrounds. The role of vocational education as a contributing factor in career choice and its potential impact for effectuating change is examined. Having established the need for such a study, the author next turns to a description of the study itself. The purposes and contents of the interim and final reports are anticipated, and the methods used for sampling and data collection are delineated. After justifying the choice of interviewing as the best technique, the author lists the categories of persons to be questioned and explains the scope of the information sought. (ELG)

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A NATIONAL STUDY OF SEX STEREOTYPING AND DISCRIMINATION IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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A NATIONAL STUDY OF SEX STEREOTYPING
AND DISCRIMINATION IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

With the passage of the Education Amendments of 1976, Congress mandated that a study be made of the extent of sex discrimination and sex stereotyping in vocational education and of progress being made toward reducing these in both training programs themselves and the occupations to which they lead. Certain positive actions were also defined to reduce sex stereotyping and discrimination in vocational education programs. These include:

a. Taking action to create awareness of vocational education programs and activities designed to reduce sex stereotyping in all fields;

b. Gathering, analyzing, and disseminating data on the status of men and women students and employees in vocational education programs of the States;

c. Developing and supporting actions to correct problems uncovered through the operation of b above;

d. Reviewing grant distribution by the State board to assure that the needs and interests of women are considered in projects benefited under the Act;

e. Reviewing all the State's vocational education programs for sex bias;

f. Monitoring the implementation of laws prohibiting sex discrimination in all of the State's hiring, firing, and promotion procedures regarding vocational education;

g. Reviewing and providing recommendations regarding the overcoming of sex stereotyping and sex bias in vocational education programs for the annual program plan and report;

h. Assisting LEAs and others in improving vocational education opportunities for women; and,

i. Making available to a number of specified agencies and councils, the Commissioner of Education, and the general public, information developed pursuant to the activities listed above.

Furthermore, states are required to reserve $50,000 of their funds for the employment of full-time personnel to achieve the above. In addition, the Act places emphasis on programs and activities to reduce sex bias in each of the categorical programs authorized.

These are rather strong and specific requirements. They were passed into law four years after the requirements of Title IX in the Education Amendments of 1972. While the present provisions and Title IX are similar in basic intent (i.e., seeking to ensure equal opportunities for males and females), there are some significant differences. Title IX speaks to the issue of "sex discrimination," which is defined as actions which limit or deny opportunities on the basis of sex. The amendments include discrimination, but also address "sex bias and stereotyping"; these factors are attitudinal in nature, much subtler, and perhaps more pervasive. While Title IX prohibits a variety of forms of discrimination, the current amendments mandate the development of programs to overcome sex stereotyping and discrimination in vocational education programs and authorize the states to use federal monies for this purpose.

What led Congress to include such specific provisions in the amendments? The problems of sex discrimination and stereotyping in vocational education and in hiring and promotion policies in the labor force have been pointed out repeatedly, including during the hearings before the House Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education in March 1975. Let me briefly summarize some of the testimony and data that led to the Congressional mandate and the study. Subsequent figures are from the Department of Labor.

Numbers of Working Women

Probably the easiest place to start is to talk about the numbers of women working today. There has been a vast increase in the numbers of working women in the last 30 years. Whereas in 1948 26% of women of working age (16-65) were

employed, today the figure is approximately 50%. In actual numbers, in 1950 17.3 million women were in the labor force; in January 1978 the figure was 37.5 million, an increase of 117%. This contrasts with an increase of 32% among men during that period. The number of working married women and working women with small children have increased markedly. In 1948, 31% of women with children between 6 and 17 worked; by 1974 that percentage was 54%. In 1948, only 13% of women with children under 6 worked; by 1974 the figure was 36%.

Far more unmarried women are working today also, due in part to the fact that there <u>are</u> more unmarried women. The number of women who are heads of households increased from 1 in 10 in 1966 to 1 in 8 by 1978, and is approaching 1 in 7 today. Forty-two percent of women workers in 1973 were single, widowed, divorced, or separated. An additional 19% has spouses who earned less than $7,000 annually. Thus, economic necessity is the overriding reason the vast majority of women work, and for this 61% of employed women, work is the only thing standing between them and poverty.

Economic necessity is not the only reason women work. The decline of the birth rate has freed more women of the responsibilities of motherhood. Looked at conversely, this decline may also be partly due to the economic necessity for women to work. Improved education among women, and greater interest in the challenge and responsibility of a career, are also contributing to the increase in working women.

While more and more women are working, their earnings remain far below those of men. The average fully employed woman earns approximately $6 for every $10 earned by her male counterpart. This lag exists in virtually every

occupational group, and most significantly, the situation is getting worse rather than better. In 1955 fully employed women earned an average of 64% of fully employed men; by 1974 that percent had dropped to 57. In 1973 the median salary for men was $11,186; for women it was $6,335. For minority women it was $5,772.

The reason for this gap is due in part to unequal pay for the same work. But most of the difference is due to the low paying jobs in which most women work. Men work in a wide variety of occupations; less than 20% fit into the 10 leading categories. By comparison, over 40% of women work in their leading 10 occupations, and in 17 of their leading occupations women account for over 90% of employees.

Within any occupational family (such as sales, health, etc.) women are heavily represented in lower paying jobs, men in higher paying ones. For example, in retail trade, most women are clerks, few work in wholesale or management positions, and men earn 65% more money on the average. More women than men wind up in "semi-professional" positions, such as social worker and teacher, but far fewer in high-status, high-paying professions such as law, medicine, and engineering.

Educational Comparisons

Women are not less educated than men. Their average years of schooling in 1973 was 12.1, compared to 12.0 for men. In 1964 women accounted for 38% of college students; in 1977 the figure edged over 50%. Nevertheless, women at every educational level earn less than men; only at the graduate degree level do they come even within 60% of men's earnings. In 1972 the average female college graduate earned $8,736 a year, the average male high school graduate $11,073.

Are there exceptions to this pattern? There are no actual reversals of these trends, but the one group of women that comes closest to men in earnings is that which pursues traditionally male dominated careers. While the number of women taking this course is increasing, there are still few. Between 1960 and 1970 the number of women lawyers rose from 2.4% to 4.7%. During the same period, the number of women doctors rose from 7% to 9%. For machinists, the number went from 1.3% to 3.1%. In 1974 only 1.6% of all female workers were employed in crafts and kindred jobs.

Women and Vocational Education

What role does vocational education play in all this? In 1975 females constituted slightly over half of vocational education students. Of these, 42% were studying homemaking and consumer education courses, and 26% office-work related courses (mostly secretarial and clerical). In the field of health, 92% of students in health and paramedical technology (including dental hygiene and nursing) were women; they constituted only 14% of those in mechanical and engineering technology.

The point is not that these discrepancies are the fault of vocational education. Even college women choose traditional roles disproportionately. In 1971 only 6.5% of college women were preparing for nontraditional careers. Thirty-six percent were earning B.A.s in education, 2.9% in business and management, 0.8% in physical sciences. Vocational education is no better or worse than the rest of society. Women bring to their career decisions a long chain of influences and socialization, contributed to by parents, peers, the media, teachers, counselors, and various other sources.

Nevertheless, vocational education is one of the major trainers of workers at less than the baccalaureate degree level. The decisions which students make and are assisted to make concerning the type of vocational training they will pursue can effect the remainder of their working lives. And work has become an important component of virtually everyone's life, not only the lives of men. Thus, vocational education is occurring at a critical juncture in students' lives. The clustering of women and men into separate occupations is definitely a limitation to women. It is, however, a limitation to men as well. While men are better off in an economic sense, their options for career directions have also been narrowed. The new legislation is concerned that equal access to all training programs be provided and encouraged for men and women. The choice for vocational education is either to perpetuate the stereotyping and resultant inequities, or to play an active role of support and encouragement in fostering equal access to all occupations for which vocational students train. Vocational education has the opportunity to make a genuine impact on a situation that has long been in need of correction.

The Study

It is because of its potential impact on sex stereotyping and discrimination as they affect career decisions that vocational education has been selected as the focus for the current study. As stated earlier, the purpose of the study is to develop and present a status report on the existence of sex discrimination and stereotyping in vocational education and to identify the progress which has been made in the reduction of inequities. This involved, first, an in-depth review of existing information to develop baseline data and hypotheses concerning causes for current inequities. Again, let me point out that the study is looking at inequities for both sexes. The existing information will be presented in the study's Interim Report which is due out later this spring. The Interim Report

will include a review of the legislation which led to the Act; a review of available literature including "thought pieces" and expert opinion regarding causes of the problem; and will provide a summary of available statistical data concerning sex stereotyping and discrimination in vocational education as revealed in previous studies.

Second, new primary data are being collected to fill in the gaps and measure progress against the baselines. The major focus of the new data collection comes from the legislation. The activities specified in the legislation and the accompanying rules and regulations provide a benchmark against which progress can be measured. The scope of the primary data collection is major. All fifty state education agencies and the District of Columbia will be visited. In addition, a random sample of 100 vocational schools from the secondary and postsecondary level will be visited. While mailed questionnaires might have been the most expedient methodology, they are frequently disregarded and give little opportunity for detailed expression of opinion and practices. Therefore, interviewing was selected as the method of choice. This method was also selected in order to reduce the data burden on the selected schools. The interview questions have been designed so that they may be answered without going through records or assembling new data. The school sample was limited to 100 schools because of the same concern for data burden.

The following interview instruments have been developed for collecting data in the field:

- State Director of Vocational Education Interview
- State Education Agency Personnel Interview
- Local Education Agency Personnel Interview
- Vocational Education Instructor Interview
- Counselor Interview
- Organizations Interview (Apprenticeship, Advocacy, and Union Groups)
- Vocational Education Student Interview and Questionnaire
- Staff Attitude Questionnaire

As can be seen from this list, the study will interview people both inside and outside the vocational education system. Within vocational education interviews will be conducted with those who interpret and set policy at the state level, those who implement programs at the local district and school levels, and the students who are the recipients of vocational education programs. From outside the vocational education system, the perspectives of women's organizations, minority organizations, and union and apprenticeship groups will be sought.

During the interviews, practices and policies at the federal, state, and local levels will be examined in order to see which facilitate, and which hinder, equal access to all training areas. The data collection will also focus on attitudes toward sex inequities and appropriate roles and responsibilities for men and women. Additionally, vocational education's interface with the community, and parents and employers in particular, will be examined. Finally, the interview instruments will seek information on perceptions of the greatest constraints to equity in order to make recommendations for future action.

The study will result in a Final Report (due out in late 1978) which will present a state of the art assessment of sex stereotyping and discrimination in vocational programs, and of practices and policies which are being implemented to make progress in reducing inequities. The intent is to make the results of the study useful to administrators and practitioners at all levels. Where problems are identified, attitudes and procedures which might be changed to correct the problem will be discussed. Similarly, where successful approaches to the elimination of sex inequities are discovered, they will be highlighted and presented as useful tools for others. In line with the latter effort, the study will also prepare case studies of up to 15 exemplary programs and practices to reduce sex discrimination and stereotyping in vocational education. The case

studies will present descriptions in sufficient detail to allow state and local personnel to set up similar programs in their jurisdictions.

The study is currently in progress and, therefore, no conclusions or recommendations can be made at this time. Available information makes clear it is a much needed study--one whose results will be useful to alleviate a wide-spread problem. Vocational education has the opportunity to take the lead among educational institutions in reducing sex stereotyping and discrimination; the results of the study should help to pave the way for this goal.